

Northeast Pennsylvania Forest Stewardship Project – Final Report

Date: October 31, 2003

Report Period: July 12, 2000 to September 30, 2002

Grant Project Period: July 12, 2000 to September 30, 2002

Grant Recipient: Pocono Northeast Resource Conservation Trust

Grant Number: 00-DG-11244225-200

Recipient Contact Person: William Lange

Project Director: James Stiehler

Progress Achieved in Accomplishing Project Goals and Objectives:

- 1. Plan Development Goal** – To prepare 50 Forest Stewardship plans on approximately 10,000 acres by aligning neighboring forest landowners into “Working Circles” and seeking bids for consulting forester services in order to reduce the cost to \$5.00 per acre or less.

Accomplishments: (see Exhibit 1)

- 75 Forest Stewardship Plans Prepared
- 18,552 Acres Planned

Unit Costs:

- Average cost for stewardship plans was \$2.74 per acre (see Exhibit 1 for individual plan costs)

Difficulties Encountered:

- Working Circle concept was not popular with consulting foresters
- Working Circles were logistically and geographically too large.
- Low bid contracting resulted in excessive demands on Service Foresters to achieve the desired quality of plans
- Low bid contracting resulted in too few plan writers to get the plans written on schedule
- Landowners for the most part did not develop a long term personal working relationship with their plan writers

- 2. Forest Practice Installation** – Deer exclusion and vegetation control

Accomplishments: (see Exhibit 2)

- 9 deer exclusion high fence demonstrations installed in five counties
- 15 deer exclusion small fence demonstrations installed in four counties
- 14.2 acres of vegetation control to support regeneration within two deer exclusion demonstration areas

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Unit Costs:

- Average cost share for standard deer fence was \$1.70 per foot or \$438.78 per acre (balance paid by landowners)
- Average cost of the small deer fence was \$521.01 per acre
- Average cost of vegetation control was \$34.96 per acre

Difficulties Encountered:

- Fence contractors and spray contractors were very busy and therefore it was difficult to line up and coordinate work between project participants at a time when the spray would be effective

3. Green Certification

Accomplishments:

- Two forestry consultants were selected from the applications received

Cost:

- No funds expended for certification

Difficulties Encountered:

- Both selected consultants declined to proceed with certification because of long term costs of maintaining certification
- Long delay in getting the consultants decisions on certification

4. Outreach Activities

- Developed our “Meet the Plan Writer Workshops” which salvaged the failed working circle concept and promoted the forester/client relationships
 - Forest Stewardship Plan Writer Peer Review Workshop
 - Forest Stewardship Seminar
- Wild Pennsylvania Conference
- Northeast Forest Landowners Conference



Richards Hemlock Tree Farm Deer Exclosure

Signature of Authorized Official:

William Lange
Pocono Northeast RCT Chairman
and Pocono Northeast RC&D Treasurer

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PROJECT SUMMARY

Forest Stewardship Plans

In April 2000 the Pocono Northeast Resource Conservation Trust was approached by the Pennsylvania Bureau of Forestry with a request that an application be submitted for funds from the Northeast Pennsylvania Community Forestry Program for use in a forest stewardship demonstration project. The Trust agreed to apply and administer the funds. The application was submitted on May 5, 2000 and the grant announcement was made by Congressman Sherwood's Office through the Scranton Tribune on June 27, 2000 (see Exhibit 3). The Forest Stewardship Committee immediately went to work to design a pilot project that focused on stewardship plan development around a "Working Circles" concept. Woodland owner associations were encouraged to organize their members and non-member neighbors into these working circles for the expected purpose of efficient cost-effective stewardship planning and forest practice installation. The initial reaction of most consulting foresters was that the working circle concept was not realistic and could divert some of their clients away. Several consultants stated that they would not be participating in the project. Despite these concerns, there was enough support to proceed.

Pocono Northeast developed a project application (Exhibit 4) and distributed it throughout the project area via the Bureau of Forestry and forest landowner associations. The formal announcement of the project began on June 30, 2000 with the deadline for applications set at October 11, 2000. At this point the Stewardship Committee began to organize the applicants into the "Working Circles". This was an exercise that was expected to be done by the various woodland owner associations but for the most part it didn't happen, so the Service Foresters developed the working circles. Ten working circles were created and as a result ten bid packages (Exhibit 5) were prepared and sent out on November 15, 2000 to stewardship plan writers on the PA Bureau of Forestry approved Forest Stewardship Plan Writer List. Site showings were conducted for each bid offering by the Service Foresters during the bidding period. The bid opening was conducted on December 20, 2000 at the RC&D Office in Mayfield, PA. Due to our concerns that there could be very few bidders, we chose not to put a limit on the number of contracts that one bidder could receive. This proved to be a major miscalculation because there were in fact a total of fifty-four bids submitted. The bids ranged from what turned out to be unrealistically low to excessively high (Exhibit 6). Even more problematic was the fact that one plan writer submitted all but one of the low bids. We were certain that he could not complete all the plans on schedule and questioned whether he could do an acceptable job for the bid price. He agreed to withdraw his bids for three Working Circles (#2, #5, and #7) and assured us that he could complete the six groups on schedule. We then accepted second low bids for these working circles. This gave us three plan writers for the project. If we could have done it over, we would have limited each consultant to two contracts, which would have resulted in at least five plan writers.

Each of the three successful bidders was issued a notice to proceed on or before January 12, 2001. By May it was apparent that the low bidder would not be able to complete the plans by our August 15, 2001 deadline. Working Circles #6, #8, and #10 had not been started so in the interest of providing the best possible service to the landowners, we terminated his contracts for these Working Circles on June 26, 2001. On July 18, 2001

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we requested new bids from the other plan writers for the three Working Circles. Unfortunately, by this time the Forest Stewardship Plan writers were not as eager to participate in the project. Their previously expressed concerns over low-bid stewardship planning had been realized. They as well as the Service Foresters and many of the landowners were dissatisfied with the Working Circle/low-bid concept because it all but eliminated the very important Forester/Client Relationship. Since we received no bids, we were forced to redesign the project to fulfill our obligations to the forest landowners that had not yet been served.

For the redesigned project it was decided to utilize the Pennsylvania Forest Stewardship Program (PFSP) cost share payment tables as the basis for funding the plans. To expedite the completion of the unfinished Working Circles, the landowners were notified that they should select a plan writer from the PFSP approved list to prepare their plan. Based on their forested acres and the rate tables (with 10% added), they were offered a sum of money to have their plan prepared. A few were successful in getting their plan underway, however most landowners were unable to line up a consulting forester or plan writer. Out of necessity was born the new project concept – “Meet the Plan Writer Workshops”. This new initiative helped our forest landowners select a plan writer and offered additional opportunities for other landowners.

On February 23, 2002, the first “Meet the Plan Writer Workshop” was held at the Lackawanna Heritage Valley Center in Mayfield, Pennsylvania. The attendance by both plan writers and forest landowners exceeded our expectations (see Exhibit 7). The program focused on the value and purpose of a forest stewardship plan and culminated with the introductions and in several cases, the selection of plan writers by the forest landowners. The cancelled Working Circle landowners that had not yet selected a plan writer were able to do so at the workshop. The remaining funds that had been saved by the low bid contracting were assigned at the workshop. An additional twenty-three forest landowners were signed up and ultimately had forest stewardship plans prepared (see Exhibit 1).

Forest Practice Installations

Forest regeneration was identified as the most important type of forestry practice for this demonstration project. The practices selected to feature were deer fencing and competitive vegetation control. The over population of white-tailed deer in northeastern Pennsylvania has made forest regeneration very difficult, however many individuals don't understand the extent of environmental devastation that is done by the deer. The demonstrations were developed as tools to educate the general public. The majority of practice funds were used for typical full height deer fence on nine tracts.



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A small sum of funds was used to demonstrate small fence deer exclosures that were installed around seed trees. These were landowner installed fence projects of sizes ranging from 0.1 acre to 0.5 acre in size. Preliminary observations have indicated that these small exclosures are very effective. Vegetation control was needed to support the deer exclosure projects but only two sites were treated. Professional spray services were difficult to obtain and coordinate at the appropriate time when the spray would be effective. To help overcome this timing problem, portable spray equipment was purchased for loan to landowners. It was used to spray ten acres and remains available through the service foresters in the Delaware Forest District.



Wall Street Lodge 5-Foot ¼ Acre Small Fence

Green Certification (SmartWood)

All the stewardship plan writers were offered an opportunity to obtain Green Certification. Five foresters applied and two were selected. Unfortunately after the foresters became aware of the costs involved in maintaining their certification, they decided to withdraw. It took several months to make this decision so it was not practical to pursue other candidates. It was requested and approved that the funds be transferred to stewardship planning and practice installation.

Outreach Activities

The Forest Stewardship Plan Writer Peer Review Workshop was conducted on February 22, 2002. It provided an opportunity for seven stewardship plan writers to fine-tune their plan writing skills. The U.S. Forest Service Stewardship Plan templates were also introduced to the plan writers. Several other plan writers were invited but they declined. A few others did, however, attend the “Meet the Plan Writer Workshop” the following day. As previously stated, the workshop was an enormous success. Both the foresters and forest landowners expressed similar positive sentiments. Outreach was also conducted through related workshops for forest landowners. Cooperative Extension and landowner groups were instrumental in coordinating and conducting the Wild Pennsylvania Conference and the 2002 Northeast Forest Landowner Conference.